

Johnson Opening Statement on Transit Reauthorization Hearing

WASHINGTON – Today, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Tim Johnson (D-SD) held a hearing entitled “Public Transportation: Priorities and Challenges for Reauthorization.” The Committee heard from the Federal Transit Administration as well as industry experts. The Banking Committee is responsible for authorizing the transit portion of the federal surface transportation program.

Below is Chairman Johnson’s statement as prepared for delivery:

“Today, the Committee holds its first hearing this Congress on public transportation as we begin work on a new surface transportation bill. This effort will build on the substantial hearing record on public transportation and transit safety that our previous chair, Sen. Dodd, and our Ranking Member, Sen. Shelby, worked to establish last Congress. I look forward to continuing this effort on a bipartisan basis with Sen. Shelby, our Subcommittee Chairman Sen. Menendez, and all of the Members of this Committee.

“This is a very important time to talk about public transportation. High gas prices are stretching families’ budgets across the nation, and where there is good transit service, taking a bus or train to work can make a big difference. Unfortunately, few Americans have that option.

“A few days ago I got a note from Bob Ecoffey on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Bob works for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He and his wife Darlene also own a Subway sandwich shop in Pine Ridge Village. I want to read part of his note for the Committee:

“Tim - I hope this message finds you well. I heard that you will be working on a transportation bill soon. Five of the employees at our sandwich shop take a bus operated by Oglala Sioux Transit to get to work. You know how vast the reservation is, so having a reliable and affordable means to get to the store really helps them.”

“I want to thank Bob for sharing his thoughts. It is sometimes forgotten, but reliable and accessible public transit is vital in rural areas like South Dakota, just as it is vital in large urban cities. Our public transit systems connect workers with employers, keep cars off congested roads, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and get people where they’re going safely and affordably.

“We are joined today by Peter Rogoff of the Federal Transit Administration and four distinguished leaders from the transportation industry. Mr. Rogoff, I share the Administration’s interest in repairing outdated infrastructure, improving safety oversight, and simplifying and consolidating existing programs. I applaud President Obama’s call to improve our transportation system, and I look forward to working with the Administration on a bill.

“The current extension of transit and highway programs runs through September 30. Congress has produced 7 short term extensions since 2009, so it’s time to get to work on this legislation. Getting a long-term bill done will not be easy, but I hope that improving transportation is a topic where both parties can find common ground.”

